

Easy Béarnaise Sauce

By Jun

Food52 Editors' Comments: Prepare the ingredients before you start, because when the sauce starts cooking you won't have time to begin chopping tarragon or separating eggs. Lower heat is better, the sauce will split if cooked too quickly. If the sauce does look like it is about to split—taking on an ever-so-slightly greasy appearance—take it off the heat and beat in a dash of cold water to bring it back together.

It was yet another night of procrastination. Instead of writing and updating my blog, I found myself scrolling through the endless glut of YouTube cooking videos, clicking through one clickbait-y title after another, helplessly spiralling into the black hole that is the "Recommended for You" bar. While binging on Binging With Babish, I somehow ended up on a [19-minute video of a chef cooking and talking in Dutch](#). (Fun fact: I don't speak Dutch.) The chef in question: Peter Goossens, owner of Hof van Cleve, a 3-Michelin-starred restaurant in Belgium that's regularly featured on the world's best restaurants lists. In this particular video, Chef Goossens makes one of his signature dishes, turbot with lobster Béarnaise. Though seemingly extravagant at first, 9 minutes and 20 seconds in, I had the biggest culinary revelation of the year as I watched him make a much easier Béarnaise sauce that breaks all conventions. Béarnaise is a close cousin to one of the [five mother sauces of French cuisine](#): hollandaise. It's rich, tangy, and most importantly, fluffy. Like hollandaise, Béarnaise is traditionally made with a base of egg yolks and butter that's whisked until it's doubled or tripled in volume. Kind of like a fluffy mayonnaise, if you will—only richer and decidedly more French. But unlike hollandaise, which has lemon juice in it, Béarnaise is perfumed with tarragon, shallots, and white wine vinegar, and is luxuriously divine when slathered onto steaks and seafood. In culinary school, I was taught the classical French way of making it: constantly whisking the yolks over a bain-marie or double boiler, while gently streaming in clarified butter until the sauce emulsifies. While this might sound simple in theory, Béarnaise really is one of the toughest French sauces to master. Whisk it too gently and it won't get sufficiently fluffy. Heat it too quickly and the egg yolks will cook and [the sauce will curdle](#). Stream in the butter too abruptly and you'll get butter-soup instead of a velvety sauce. Even after nine months of culinary school and over a dozen tries, any attempt I make at cooking a Béarnaise sauce will seem more like a gamble than any application of actual culinary knowhow. So when I saw Chef Goossens's audaciously easy method for making Béarnaise, I was shell-shocked. Not only did it take a fraction of the time it takes me to make it, the resultant sauce was twice as fluffy and velvety as any Béarnaise I'd ever made. All he did was put two egg yolks in a saucepan with some water and what I'm guessing was tarragon oil (I don't speak Dutch), and whisked it over the flattop stove until the eggs were aerated, no double boiler needed. To finish it off, he just plopped some soft butter into the fluffy egg-sauce, and that was that! The whole thing took less than 5 minutes. In a daze from the sheer simplicity of this technique, I tried recreating it at home, and it totally worked! While I did have to do some guesswork in estimating the quantities of ingredients used in the video, I was in awe as each time I whisked one of my test batches, the lustrous sauce came together like magic. Needless to say, Chef Goossens's Béarnaise hack totally puts all my culinary school struggles to shame. And in doing so, he's made the typically finicky, hard-to-master French steak sauce a feasible undertaking for any home cook.

makes 1 cup **Prep time:** 10 min

Cook time: 15 min

- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons minced shallots
- 3 sprigs tarragon, leaves stripped and roughly chopped
- 2 egg yolks
- 3 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter, at room temperature

1. Place the white wine vinegar, minced shallot, and half the chopped tarragon in a saucepan. Heat this on a medium-low flame for 5 minutes, until the shallots are sweated and the liquid has reduced by about half. Strain out the solids, replace the concentrated liquid back into the saucepan, and let it cool to room temperature.
2. Add the egg yolks, water, vegetable oil, and salt into the saucepan with the concentrated vinegar, and heat over a medium-low flame while whisking vigorously. The goal here is to whisk the eggs to a fluffy, custard-like consistency, which should take around 3-5 minutes. Once you see it start to steam, be extra-vigilant: if you overcook the sauce, it'll turn into scrambled eggs. Remove the pan from the heat if needed to better control the temperature.
3. When the sauce thickens and reaches the desired consistency, add in the butter and the rest of the chopped tarragon, and whisk until the butter dissolves.
4. The sauce is best served immediately, but can hold well for 30 minutes to an hour. It's classically paired with steak, but can go well with fish or even grilled vegetables!